



The story

Shepherding isn't what it used to be.

It's never been an easy life, up there on the hillside day after day, night after night. With just a bunch of hairy animals for company – and that's the shepherds I'm talking about! It's not as though you get much out of a sheep either – conversation-wise I mean. I think they were at the back of the queue when the good Lord was giving out the brains and he said, 'there's only a bit left, so let's just share this out amongst the whole flock'.

At least we used to be left alone. I think the fact that we all smelt like sheep was part of it. Well, now that the Romans have not wind of us, as it were, we're being taxed and regulated out of existence. They'll be wanting the sheep to speak Latin next!

So there other night I was a bit in down the dumps and thinking about how life's turned out. I was quite good at school you see, and then my Dad died suddenly. Mum struggled after that. I had to find work to help make ends meet and so it was the hillside for me, and that's where I've been ever since. Feeling a bit miserable and smelling like a sheep. Starting to look like one too, Mother says.

So it was a bit of a shock when we had The Visitation. Me and the lads were sitting round the fire trying to keep warm, when all of a sudden there was fire everywhere. We panicked a bit. Tony thought it was a weapon of mass destruction, but he's always had a creative imagination. We were screaming and shouting until a much more tuneful noise drowned us out. It was a bunch of angels, and one of them said;

"Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people."

"Jesus Christ!", I said.

"That right", said the angel. "He's been born this very day".

"Good God!", said Geoff. "Well where is he? In the palace, or the temple?"

That's when the angel told us we'd find him in a manger. I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. Christ the Saviour in a manger! Give me a break.



Well, we went to look – I mean you've got to haven't you, when you get the angelic Full Monty, with the old "Glory to God in the highest" routine. So we ran off, like a bunch of sheep streaming down the hillside and sure enough there he was – in a manger.

And you know, I think that's what set me off. I could cope with the angels, but seeing this perfect little baby in a manger – a piece of shepherd's equipment – it set me off and I cried buckets. There was me, feeling sorry for myself and for what might have been and here was Almighty God in a manger. You couldn't ask for a worse start in life. At least it took me sixteen years to start smelling like a sheep. He was born right into it!

And I can't explain it, but I know he's the best hope we've got.

We don't need more kings like Herod, or more imperialists like the Romans or even – dare I say it – more priests like the ones in the Temple, trying to keep out the riff-raff. We need a shepherd. That's what we need. We're lost and scared most of us, aren't we? And a bit thick some of the time. We're no better than the sheep if we're honest.

We'll now I've found him, I intend to stick around. It could just be the best thing that ever happened to shepherding.